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ABSTRACT

The use of a portfolio approach to assessment for graduate students in a school-community relations course was studied. Twenty-eight graduate students constructed portfolios consisting of articles from the media, professional journals, and the Internet. These materials were organized into categories of "understanding the community," "administering the program," "relations with special publics," and "communication tools and strategies." Each graduate was required to have one article ready for distribution, presentation, and discussion each week for a 4-week period during the 15-week class. Results show that a standard, or objective, that required a student to have knowledge of current principles and practices of school-community relations could be demonstrated by the student's ability to cite, describe, and discuss the "current happenings" from portfolio articles. Using this type of portfolio appeared to be a successful way to evaluate student knowledge. (SLD)

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ASSESSING PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES USING PORTFOLIOS WITH GRADUATES ENROLLED IN AN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP CLASS

A Paper

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Professors in Educational Leadership programs have in the past utilized performance based outcomes as a partial means of assessing whether graduate students have reached pre-set standards. Additionally, a significant number of accreditating agencies and state boards of education are moving toward performance based assessment.

The purpose of this study was (1) to direct graduates in meeting the specifications of three standards/objectives with performance outcomes, commonly utilized in "School-Community Relations" courses; and (2) to have these students reflect upon articles taken from the media, professional journals, and Internet as attributes of evidence, using portfolios as a viable means of assessment.

Guidelines established by The Northwest Evaluation Association regarding utilization of portfolios for student assessment were used in this study. These guidelines recommend student participation in selection of portfolio content, process for selection of materials, criteria for judging merit, and attributes of evidence for reflection by the student.

The methodology in this study involved 28 graduates enrolled in a "School-Community Relations" course during the 2000 Spring semester. Portfolios were cooperatively constructed consisting of articles from the media, professional journals, and the Internet. The materials were organized according to four categories; "understanding the community", "administering the program", "relations with special publics", and "communication tools and strategies". The criteria for selection of articles was based on quality and relevance to a particular category. A summary was attached to each article, complete with reflections.

The duration of the semester consisted of fifteen consecutive weeks. Each of the 28 graduates were required to have one article ready for distribution, presentation and discussion each week for a four week period, resulting in a minimum total of 112 select articles for each

portfolio. Other materials could be included in the portfolio at the discretion of the student. The first four weeks at the onset of the semester were reserved for lecture and discussion of the four categories with material from a text based on the study of School Community Relations. The remaining seven weeks were utilized with presentations by the instructor, consisting primarily of current video tapes and simulations.

The format for presentation of articles was designed by dividing the class into seven groups of four students. In order to ensure coverage of elementary, middle, and secondary school innovations, care was taken to include both graduates with elementary and secondary major concentrations in each of the seven groups. Following an hour of working in groups, a decision was made regarding which of the four articles would be selected for presentation to the entire class in the form of a ten minute panel. The three standards/objectives, which were used for assessment, were stated as follows.

Upon completion of this course, the student should:

A. be able to analyze community and district power structures and their relationships to school goals and programs.
B. be able to articulate the school's vision, mission, and priorities to the community and media in effort to gain support from the community.
C. have knowledge of ways in which to involve family and community in appropriate policy development, program planning, and assessment methods.

The results of the study revealed that a standard/objective requiring a graduate to have knowledge of current principles and practices of "School-Community Relations", could be witnessed by the student's ability to cite, describe, and discuss; as specified, "current happenings". This ability would be acquired through the student's reflections of the articles in

the portfolio collection. The reflections would be the attributes of evidence. "What have I learned from this experience?" Of interest among the findings of this study are the following revelations.

In preparation for demonstrating performance outcomes in meeting standard/objective C., it was found that basic to principles of good community relations occurs in effort to get parents involved in the elementary school. The articles presented in class support the premise that parents, and even grandparents, are more comfortable serving as teacher aides and providing assistance to students in the elementary classroom. They are also less likely to volunteer help in classes of the higher grade levels. This same factor remains true when asked to serve on program and policy making committees.

In preparing to reach Standard/Objective B., it was found that parents of students in higher grade levels are more ready to serve as members of booster groups for sports and performance organizations. Standard A. is also more readily met in schools of the higher grade levels. Local business and industry are often especially interested in helping students in these grade levels, and are frequently included as members of planning and policy-making committees.

Standard B. is especially applicable in the middle school grades, as these are the exploratory years with few but large student organizations. These organizations often secure community support and involvement.

In the process of collecting quality articles according to the four categories for the portfolios, "communication tools and strategies" had the highest number of article entries. Articles from current periodicals in educational leadership, and the Internet, frequently describe innovative methods used in successfully gaining community support. In a more practical

approach to learning about innovative techniques; local, state, and regional newspapers can be used.

In response to Standard C., it was found that principles of site-based management are congruent with involving parents and other members of the community in policy development, program planning, and assessment. It also became apparent that Standard A. would be a prerequisite to successfully meeting the requirements of Standard C.

In summary, using portfolios as a viable means of assessment appeared to be successful with this class of graduates enrolled in "School-Community Relations". One area which could have been stronger was the use of simulations involving hypothetical situations.

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